

Preventing and Preparing for Disaster

W I L D F I R E

Brush Clearance Distances and Guidelines

The County Fire Code states that parcel owners are responsible throughout the year for the maintenance of all brush, flammable vegetation (native and/or ornamental), and other combustible materials situated on their property.

*General clearing requirements are listed below. Please review these clearing requirements and take appropriate action prior to the May 1 deadline for brush clearance in Topanga. Abatement of potential or existing hazards prior to inspections saves the Fire Department and property owners valuable money and time and ensures a safer community. If hazardous fire conditions exist on your property at the time of inspection, you will be issued an Official Inspection Report that will indicate existing violations and provide specific clearing instructions and a compliance deadline.**

Thousands of homes are in serious danger of destruction by fire because of their proximity to brush-covered areas. Homes with wood shake roofs, wood siding, decks, patio covers, or exposed eaves are particularly vulnerable to the spread of fire. Despite efforts by firefighters, wildland fires fanned by strong winds can destroy homes. It is the legal responsibility of the property owner to take the necessary action to clear vegetation around all structures. A fire-safe landscape creates a defensible space to help protect against approaching wildfires.

15

**Failure to comply with the Official Inspection Report issued at the time of the inspection will result in an administrative penalty and an additional special assessment on your annual tax bill.*


W I L D F I R E

Brush Clearance Distances and Guidelines

Brush Clearance Requirements

- 1. All flammable vegetation shall be mowed or cut to a stubble height of 3" for 50' around any structure.*
- 2. Create a firebreak for the next 150', for a total of 200', around any structure by clearing, trimming, thinning, cutting back, and removing flammable vegetation.*
- 3. Single specimens of trees, ornamental shrubbery, or ground covers are permissible, provided that they do not form a means of transmitting fire from native growth to the structure. It is recommended that specimens shall be spaced a minimum of 15' or 3 times their diameter from other specimens, structures, or surrounding native brush.*
- 4. Access roads shall be maintained with a minimum of 10' of brush clearance on each side. Fire access roads shall have an unobstructed vertical clearance clear to the sky. Trees overhanging fire access roads shall be maintained to provide adequate vertical clearance.*
- 5. Provide a minimum of 3' of brush clearance around all fire hydrants and a minimum of 10' around all propane tanks.*
- 6. It is strongly recommended that all trees and shrubs be maintained free of dead wood and litter. Trees and shrubs may be required to be trimmed up from the ground 1/3 of their height.*

For additional information regarding specific clearing requirements, contact your local fire station or the Brush Clearance Unit at 626-969-2375. Your local fire station also maintains a list of vendors who can be contracted to do brush clearance.

- 
- *All clearance distances indicated on the County of Los Angeles Fire Department Official Inspection Report (410B) are measured on a horizontal plane. If a structure sits on a slope, the actual distance down a slope will be longer than the 200' typically required for brush clearance. Increasing slopes require longer distances: for example, a 20% slope requires 210' of horizontal clearance, while a 50% slope requires 283' of horizontal clearance.*
 - *As natural slopes start to approach 50% or 45 degrees, erosion becomes an important consideration and brush clearance activities will need to be reduced. There should be a balance between fire safety and erosion potential.*
 - *In these cases, trees and shrubs should be lollipopped, by pruning the lower branches up 6' or 1/3 the height, while leaving the majority of the canopy intact. All dead wood must be removed. If shrubs are removed, the roots should remain in the soil to hold it in place, not grubbed out. When these shrubs grow back the following year, they can be cut back to the root crown again as routine maintenance.*
 - *Some separation of canopies will reduce fire behavior, but may cause increased erosion. In these cases, consulting with the Malibu Brush Clearance Coordinator will help property owners comply with required brush clearance while preserving soils from erosion.*
 - *See pages 55–56 of the Topanga Disaster Survival Guide for more information.*

W I L D F I R E

Community Responsibilities

Each owner is responsible for brush clearance to 200' from all structures, but only on their property. If an adjacent structure is within 200' of your property line, you may be required to perform brush clearance to provide defensible space for this structure. (County of Los Angeles Fire Code 1117.2.2(3), 1117.2.3)

All homeowners must be aware of this requirement and their responsibility. Neighborhood cooperation is imperative to ensure defensible space for all structures. Although the Fire Department does brush clearance inspections on an annual basis for every home in the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone, occasionally some areas of the community may be overlooked. This is where each homeowner has the opportunity to help ensure that the community becomes safer in the event of a conflagration or major disaster. If you observe areas of brush that should be cleared or maintained anytime between August and when we have significant rainfall of 3" or more, you can contact your local fire station or the Brush Clearance Office for help. The Fire Department will inspect the hazard and determine the appropriate course of action. Each neighborhood in Topanga should work collaboratively to ensure the safety and well-being of the community. Protection of life and property is the primary goal of the Fire Department, but without proper brush clearance, structures and lives are at unnecessary risk.

**County of Los Angeles Fire Department
Fire Station 69
401 S. Topanga Canyon Blvd., Topanga CA 90290-9774
310-455-1766**



The Public/Private Land Interface

The natural beauty of Topanga has been preserved by federal, state, and local park agencies.

The management of these publicly owned parklands, including policies regarding fuel modification and brush clearance, is governed by statute and science-based principles and may differ from local regulations. Please contact the park agency that owns land adjacent to your property regarding specific fuel-modification questions. For complete information go to the CA FAIR Plan Web site <http://www.cfpnet.com/>. Please note that you are not required to clear more than 200 horizontal feet on your property, nor are you required to clear another owner's adjacent property within that 200'.

FAIR Plan

Many residents in the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone have FAIR Plan Fire Insurance. When reviewing a homeowner policy, FAIR Plan may decide to add a surcharge to your policy because of inadequate brush clearance or excessive distance from the nearest County Fire Station. • If you believe that your brush clearance is adequate and you have received a brush clearance surcharge in error, you may contact the L.A. County Fire Department, Forestry Division, Brush Clearance Unit at 626-969-2375. A brush clearance coordinator can meet you onsite to confirm code compliance and take photos; if your property is in compliance, the Forestry Chief can write a letter confirming compliance with the Fire Code for you to use in an appeal of the brush clearance surcharge. • If FAIR Plan is adding a surcharge based on excessive distance from the nearest County Fire Station, please contact the L.A. County Fire Department's Division VII Office at 310-317-1802; it is sometimes possible to create a Memorandum of Understanding with contiguous first responders in other cities to mitigate this issue.

W I L D F I R E**Southern California Edison (SCE) Power Line Clearance**

Any person may request a power line inspection from SCE if they observe tree branches or palm fronds within 4' of any transmission line. Trees or vegetation touching transmission lines, called "Burners" or TLCs (Tree Line Contact), are very dangerous and should be reported immediately to SCE for corrective pruning. Do not attempt to prune any tree with this condition yourself; severe injury or death may result. SCE has trained tree maintenance workers who perform this work on a daily basis. Typically, TLCs are immediately inspected by SCE and pruned within 24 hours of inspection.

**SCE Line Clearing Contact for Malibu and Topanga:
661-257-8256**

Fire Access Roads

Fire access roads include all roads, driveways, and turnarounds that may be used by emergency personnel during an emergency response situation. Fire access roads shall have an unobstructed vertical clearance to the sky. Trees overhanging fire access roads shall be maintained to provide adequate vertical clearance. (F.C. 902.2.2.1)

Roadways: Clear and remove all flammable or combustible growth for a minimum of 10' on each side of every roadway, whether public or private. (F.C. 1117.10)



W I L D F I R E**Emergency Oak Tree Permits (EOTPs)**

A permit is required for any activity affecting the health of an oak tree, when the tree is 25" or more in circumference, or 8" in diameter at 4.5' above mean natural grade. Multiple-trunk trees are ordinance size if at least two trunks, when combined, total 12" in diameter.

Dead limbs may be removed at any time as well as live limbs up to 2" in diameter. Removing limbs within 10' of a chimney is allowed to maintain fire clearances. Except for the above, all other pruning activity in live wood over 2" in diameter requires a permit.

If requested to prune oak trees by a County of Los Angeles Fire Department Official Inspection Report, please contact one of the two offices below to have an inspection by the County Forester, who can issue the EOTP. There is no fee to obtain an EOTP.

An EOTP may be requested from:

***L.A. Co. Fire Department,
Malibu Forestry Unit
942 N. Las Virgenes Rd.
Calabasas, CA 91302-2137
818-222-1108***

or

***L.A. Co. Fire Department,
Environmental Review Unit
12605 Osborne St.
Pacoima, CA 91331-2129
818-890-5719***

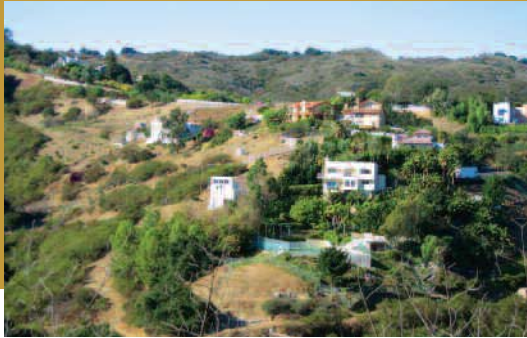


W I L D F I R E

Fuel Modification Zones

*The following pages show proper
brush clearance in a variety of situations.*

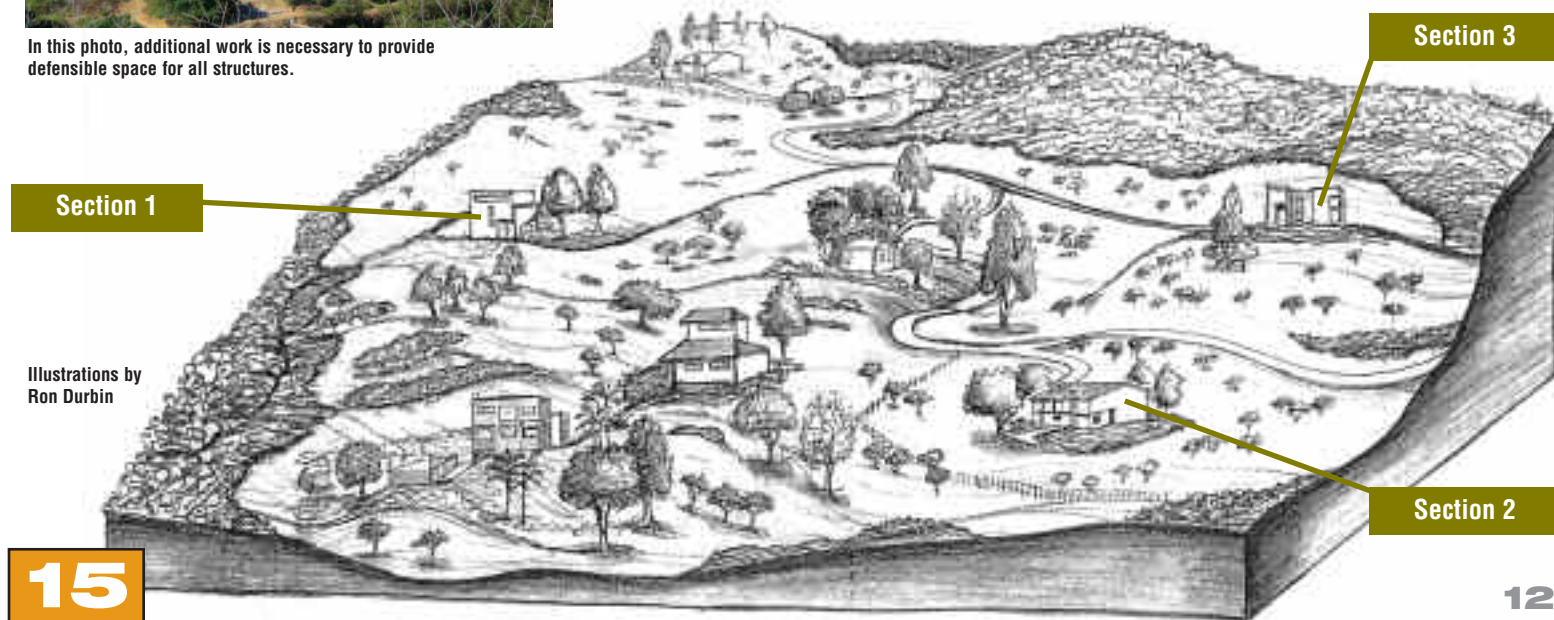




In this photo, additional work is necessary to provide defensible space for all structures.

Each owner is responsible for clearing brush to 200' from all structures, but only on their property. When an adjacent structure is within 200' of your property line, you may be required to provide brush clearance on your property to ensure defensible space of the adjacent structure. (County of L.A. Fire Code 1117.2.2(3), 1117.2.3)

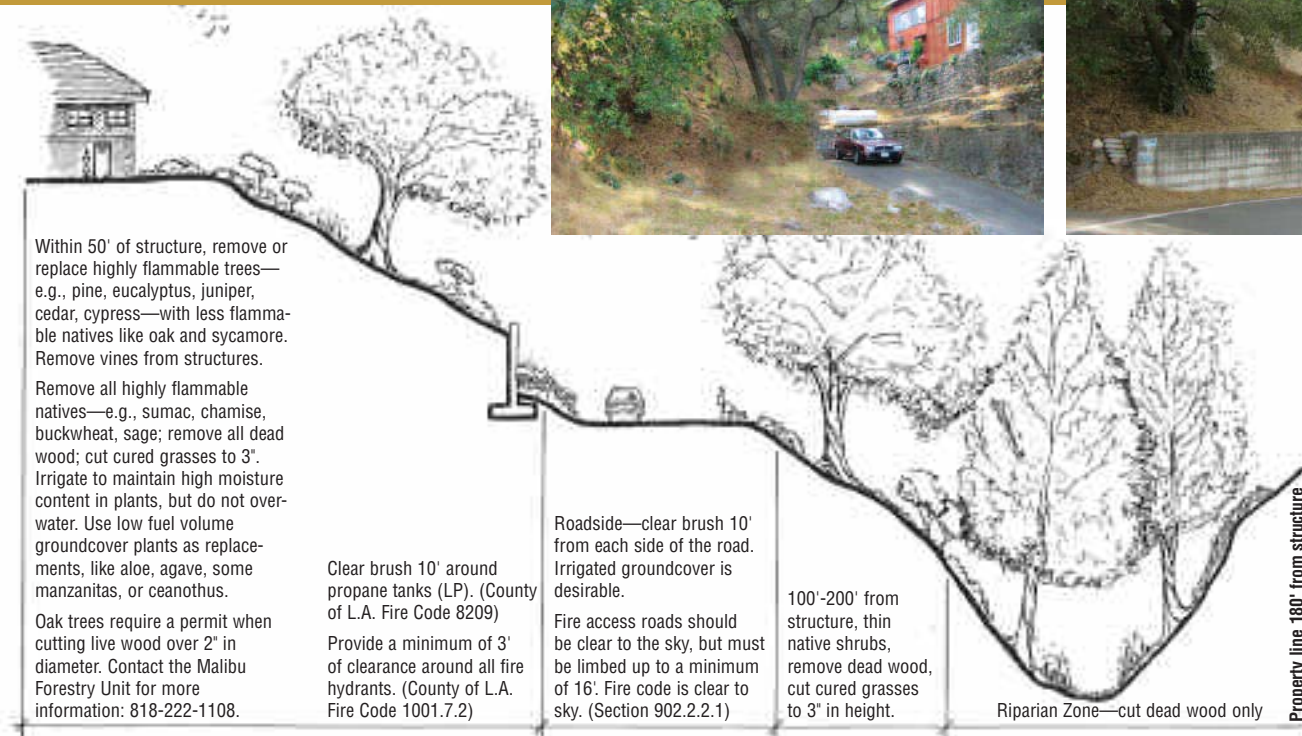
All homeowners must be aware of this requirement and their responsibility. Neighborhood cooperation is imperative to ensure defensible space for all structures.

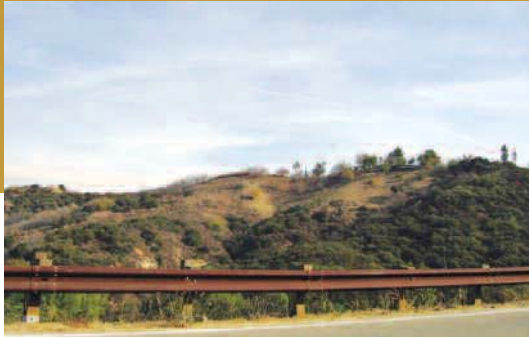


Illustrations by
Ron Durbin

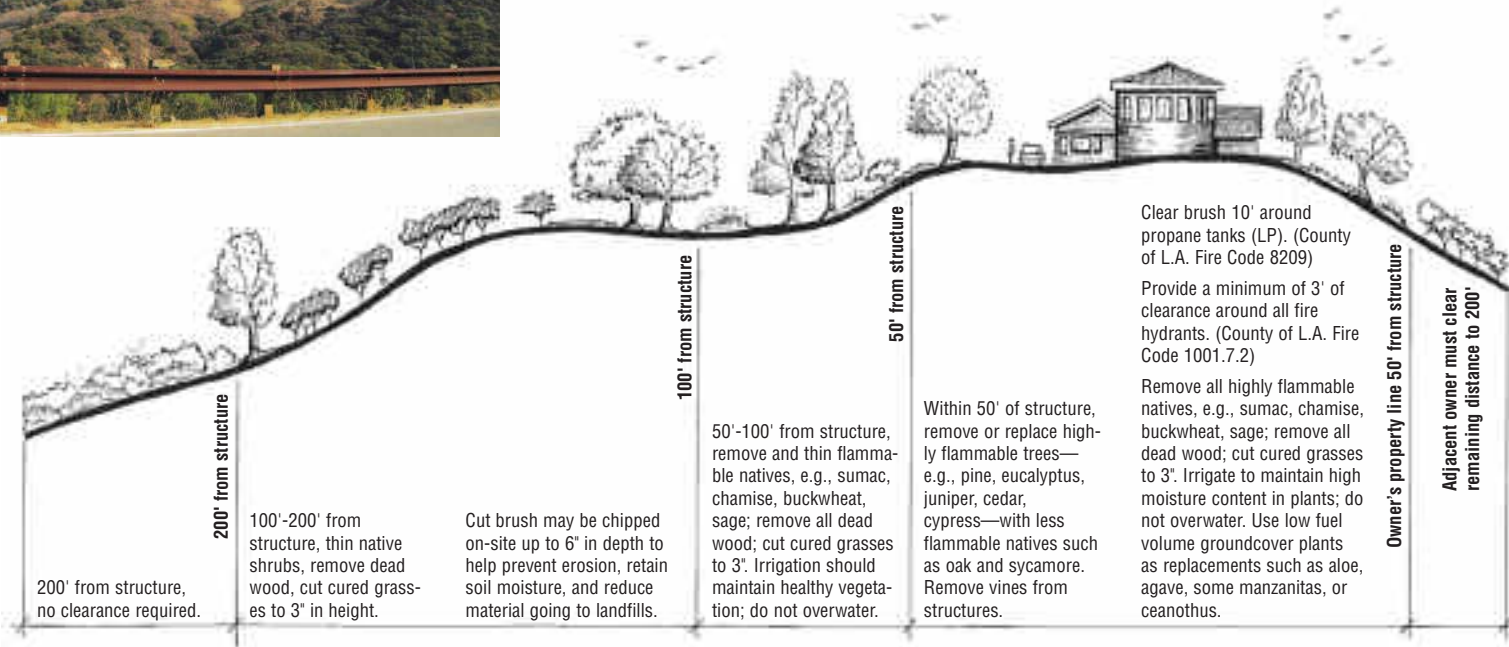
Fuel Modification Zones

Section 1: Structure on top of slope with riparian zone below





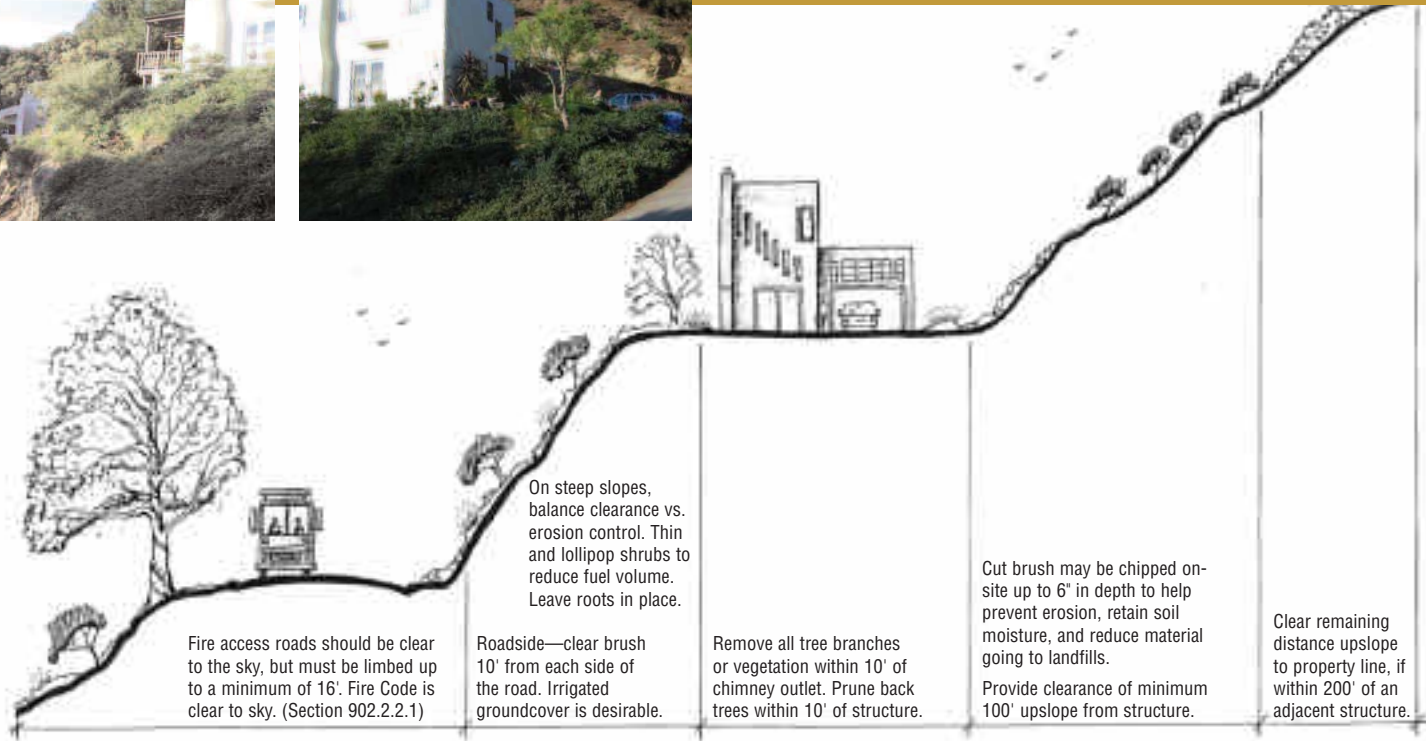
Section 2: Structure surrounded by native brush and mild slopes



Fuel Modification Zones



Section 3: Structure mid-slope with brush above and below and steep slopes





Glossary

- Aerial Fuels:** *All live and dead vegetation located in the forest canopy or above the surface fuels, including tree branches and crowns, snags, moss, and high brush.*
- Conflagration:** *A raging, destructive fire; often used to denote such a fire with a moving front, as distinguished from a firestorm.*
- Ground fuels:** *All materials lying on or immediately above the ground, including needles or leaves, duff, grass, small dead wood, downed logs, stumps, large limbs, and low brush.*
- High hazard area:** *Geographic area prone to significant wildfire events owing to vegetation, topography, and weather. All of Topanga Canyon, Malibu, and the Santa Monica Mountains are in the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ).*
- Lollipop:** *To limb up trees and shrubs by pruning the lower branches off, leaving one to three trunks, removing dead wood, while keeping canopy relatively intact. Purpose: to separate ground fuels from aerial fuels and reduce fuel load.*
- Slope:** *Determined by measuring rise over run (rise/run) as a percentage.*
- Steep slope:** *A grade of at least 45 degrees or 50%, where erosion is a significant consideration.*

W I L D F I R E

Fire-Resistant Plants

These native plants are good options for a fire-safe landscape. Drought-tolerant nonnative species can also be good choices if they don't self-sow or naturalize; but consult the "Plants to Avoid" list that follows before selecting any nonnatives. A good rule of thumb is to use plants with high fire resistance closer to your house and those with lower resistance farther away.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Fire Resistance	Height	Spread	Exposure	Flower Color
Succulents:						
Agave species	Agave	high	1–6'	1–10'	sun	yellow-green
Dudleya species	Bluff lettuce	high	<1.5'	varies	sun–part shade	yellow
Sedum species	Stonecrop	high	<1'	varies	sun–part shade	many
Low-Growing Ground-Cover Plants:						
Arctostaphylos uva-ursi	Compact manzanita	low	1'	6'	sun–part shade	white-pink
Baccharis pilularis 'Twin Peaks'	Dwarf coyote brush	medium	1–2'	6'	sun–part shade	white
Ceanothus gloriosus	Pt. Reyes ceanothus	low	1–1.5'	4–6'	sun–part shade	blue
Ceanothus griseus var. horizontalis	Carmel creeper	low	1–3'	5–15'	sun–part shade	blue
Heuchera maxima	Island alum root	medium	1–2'	1–2'	shade	white
Mahonia repens	Creeping barberry	medium	1–3'	3'	sun–part shade	yellow
Shrubs and Trees:						
Calliandra eriophylla	Fairy duster	low	3'	4–5'	sun	pink, white
Cercis occidentalis	Western redbud	low	10–20'	8–10'	sun–part shade	magenta
Heteromeles arbutifolia	Toyon, hollywood	low	6–10'	6–10'	sun–part shade	white
Mimulus aurantiacus	Sticky monkey-flower	low	3'	3'	sun	orange
Platanus racemosa	California sycamore	low	30–80'	20–50'	sun	—
Quercus species	Oaks	low	to 100'	to 60'	sun	—
Rhamnus californica	Coffeeberry	low	3–15'	3–10'	sun–part shade	yellow-green
Rhus integrifolia	Lemonadeberry	low	4–5'	15'	sun–part shade	pink
Romneya coulteri	Matilija poppy	high	6'	6–8'	part shade–shade	white

Perennials and annuals:

Achillea species	Yarrow	medium	2-3'	may spread	sun-part shade	white, pink
Cistus species	Rockrose	medium	1-5'	1-4'	sun-part shade	white, pink
Clarkia amoena	Farewell-to-spring	low	4-5"	<1'	sun-part shade	pink, lavender
Epilobium californica (syn. Zauschneria)	California fuchsia	low	1-3'	1-3'	sun	red
Eriophyllum species	Golden yarrow	low	1-2'	1-2'	sun	yellow
Eschscholzia californica	California poppy	low	8-24"	to 1'	sun	orange
Iris douglasiana	Douglas iris	medium	1-2'	clumping	sun-part shade	varies
Isomeris arborea	Bladder-pod	high	2-4'	3-4'	sun-part shade	yellow
Layia platyglossa	Tidytips	low	5-16"	to 1'	sun	yellow
Lupinus nanus	Sky lupine	low	8-24"	to 2'	sun	blue
Nemophila menziesii	Baby blue eyes	low	6-12"	to 1'	sun-part shade	blue
Penstemon species	Beard tongue	low	1-3'	1-3'	sun-part shade	purple, red
Phacelia species	California desert bluebells	low	6"-3'	6"-3'	sun	blue, purple
Sisyrinchium bellum	Blue-eyed grass	low	8-10"	clumping	sun	blue-purple
Sisyrinchium californicum	Yellow-eyed grass	low	1'	clumping	sun-part shade	yellow

Plants to Avoid

The following plants, mostly nonnative, are highly flammable and should not be planted near your house. If they are already growing on your property, you might want to consider phasing them out and replacing them with more fire-resistant species.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Scientific Name	Common Name	Scientific Name	Common Name
Acacia species	Acacia (trees and shrubs)	Dodonaea viscosa	Hopseed bush	Pinus species	Pine
Adenostoma fasciculatum	Chamise, greasewood	Eriogonum species	Buckwheat	Taxus species	Yew
Artemisia californica	California sagebrush	Eucalyptus species	Eucalyptus, gum tree	Thuja species	Arborvitae
Bougainvillea	Bougainvillea	Gelsemium sempervirens	Carolina jessamine	All ornamental grasses	
Cedrus species	Cedar	Hakea suaveolens	Hakea	All berry vines	
Cortaderia selloana	Pampas grass	Juniperus species	Juniper	Large Manzanitas (Arctostaphylos) should not be planted close to the house, and must be maintained free of dead wood.	
Cupressus species	Cypress	Pennisetum species	Fountain grass		
		Phormium tenax	New Zealand flax		
		Picea species	Spruce		



We all know how to cope with heat, but freezes are a rare and potentially damaging situation that many of us don't prepare for. They can mean disaster for your homes, as well as for your landscape.

Preparing Your Home and Family

- ☐ *Review and update your family emergency plan.*
- ☐ *Have a plan for finding a nearby shelter or other warm environment should your home heating system fail.*
- ☐ *Replenish your emergency supply kit, including battery-operated radio and flashlights. Keep extra blankets on hand.*
- ☐ *Have a plan for meeting the needs of infants, children, seniors, those with disabilities, and pets.*
- ☐ *Winterize your house, barn, shed or any other structure that may provide shelter for your family, neighbors, livestock, or equipment. Clear rain gutters, repair roof leaks, and cut away tree branches that could fall on a house or other structure during a storm.*
- ☐ *Insulate pipes and allow faucets to drip during cold weather to avoid freezing. Learn how to shut off water valves in case a pipe bursts.*
- ☐ *Have the home heating system inspected and ensure that your chimney is cleaned and maintained.*
- ☐ *Maintain a sufficient supply of heating fuel.*
- ☐ *Move family pets indoors or to an enclosure out of the elements. Likewise, protect livestock or other large animals from the cold weather.*
- ☐ *Move plants indoors or cover with blankets or plastic to prevent freezing.*
- ☐ *Do NOT bring heating devices into the home that are intended for outdoor use, such as barbecues and other cooking equipment or other fuel-burning devices. These items can produce deadly carbon monoxide.*
- ☐ *Keep fire extinguishers on hand, and make sure everyone in your house knows how to use them. House fires pose an additional risk, when people turn to alternate heating sources without taking the necessary safety precautions.*

Dressing for the Weather

- ☐ *Wear several layers of loose-fitting, lightweight, warm clothing rather than one layer of heavy clothing. The outer garments should be tightly woven and water-repellent.*
- ☐ *Wear mittens, which are warmer than gloves, and a hat.*
- ☐ *Cover your mouth with a scarf to protect your lungs.*

Traveling with Caution

- ☐ *Let others know of your route and your estimated time of arrival.*
- ☐ *Make sure your tires have adequate tread.*
- ☐ *Augment your car's emergency supply kit with a shovel, windshield scraper, and blankets.*
- ☐ *Maintain at least a half tank of gas during the winter season.*
- ☐ *Check road conditions. Slow down on corners and watch for ice.*

Recognizing Symptoms of Exposure

- ☐ *Confusion, dizziness, exhaustion, and shivering are signs of hypothermia. If you experience any of these symptoms, seek medical attention immediately.*
- ☐ *In the case of overexposure to freezing temperatures, remove wet clothing and immediately warm the body with a blanket or warm fluids like hot cider or soup. Avoid caffeine or alcohol.*

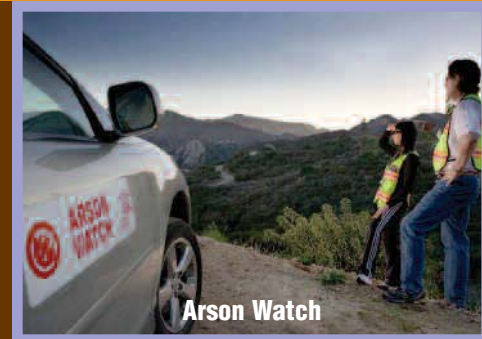




Topanga Animal Rescue



Topanga Coalition
for Emergency Preparedness
(T-CEP)



Arson Watch



The Los Angeles County Dept.
of Animal Care and Control Equine
Response Team (LACDACCERT)



Community Emergency
Response Team (CERT)

HELP

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MY COMMUNITY?

*You've cleared your brush and updated your disaster kit;
you've found your nearest CSA and made arrangements with family members
to reunite in an emergency outside the Canyon. Plans for your personal safety are taken
care of—but there's more you can do to help your neighborhood and all of Topanga.*

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MY COMMUNITY?

*Topanga has a variety of community organizations that contribute to emergency preparedness and response.
Here's what you need to know to get started.*

Topanga Coalition for Emergency Preparedness (T-CEP)

310-455-3000 • www.t-cep.org • P.O. Box 1708, Topanga, CA 90290

The Topanga Coalition for Emergency Preparedness (T-CEP) is a nonprofit, volunteer organization whose purpose is to help the Topanga community prepare for and cope with disasters such as wildfires, floods, and earthquakes. In T-CEP teams such as Hot Line, Disaster Radio, Red Cross, Equine Education, Mental Health, and Neighborhood Network, Topanga residents can find a perfect match for their interests and concerns.

Arson Watch

310-455-4244 • www.arsonwatch.com • P.O. Box 197, Topanga, CA 90290

Arson Watch is a volunteer program of the Malibu—Lost Hills Sheriff's station whose goal is to prevent wildfires in the Santa Monica Mountains.

On high fire danger days, volunteers patrol the area looking for fires or fire hazards and seeking to deter deliberate arson as well as careless behavior that might start a fire. Patrols are by car or on horseback, bicycle, or foot, and members communicate by two-way radio.

The Los Angeles County Dept. of Animal Care and Control Equine Response Team (LACDACCERT)

Coordinating Officer • 818-706 5883 • 29525 Agoura Rd., Agoura, CA 93012

The LACDACCERT is a Countywide volunteer organization that originated in the Topanga/Malibu area after the 1993 firestorm.

LACDACCERT's purpose is to assist with the safe evacuation of horses and livestock during large- and small-scale disasters.

Team members must complete from 10 to 50 hours of training, which includes Fire Safety, First Aid, Horse Handling, and Tow Vehicle classes. The group also works to educate horse owners on disaster preparedness.

Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)

Topanga Coordinator • Brad Davis • 310-455-0673 / L.A. County Fire Department CERT Coordinator • 323-881-3077

CERT is a program that has been developed nationwide to provide basic training to members of the public in safety and life-saving skills.

The Topanga CERT's mission is to help the community by providing support in the event of a major emergency or catastrophe. CERT trainees learn about disaster preparedness, basic fire suppression, principles of light search and rescue operations, assessment of multiple victims (including triage and basic treatment of life-threatening injuries), and organization and management of volunteer response to a disaster (including disaster psychology). They provide general support for Los Angeles County first responders, as requested.

Topanga Animal Rescue

310-455-7268 • rescue@topangaonline.com • www.topangaanimalrescue.com

Topanga Animal Rescue is a nonprofit organization founded by Susan Clark that has the ability to mobilize a veterinary field triage unit in the event of an emergency as well as provide ongoing animal education outreach programs for the community.

For more about community organizations, see pages 109-118 of the Topanga Disaster Survival Guide.